

VALUE OF THE ANCIENT MASTERS. ARTISTICAL EDUCATION.

SIR,—Although Mr. Cave Thomas returns to the charge, I am still unconvinced. Let any unprejudiced critic spend an impartial half-hour in either end of Trafalgar-square,—I demand no other test,—and the decided superiority of the ancient over the modern schools of painting will be, alas! too manifest. But here Mr. Cave Thomas and myself are at one. He is a man of too good taste to deny the genius of the earlier schools of Italy, Flanders, and Spain, or to question (I quote his own words) the power of the ancient artists. His main quarrel with them is that they abstract the funds from the painters of the present day. Now is this so? Can any description of picture meet with a readier sale than any works of those highly-gifted men who annually exhibit their performances in this metropolis? It might be invidious to name them; but in behalf of one, now no more, such a privilege may be permitted. The estimation in which the works of Sir David Wilkie are held both in England and abroad is amply proved by the large prices they bring. I may indeed cite an instance within my knowledge. "The Distraint for Rent" was purchased by Mr. W. Wells, only a few months ago, for upwards of a thousand guineas, at the sale of his uncle's collection. Having mentioned names, I will now give an instance without a name. A young man, under the age of twenty-two, obtained a few years ago 400*l.* for a fancy painting, '*tableau de genre*,' being, as I am credibly informed by those conversant with the history of painting, the *largest sum* ever realized for a single picture by so juvenile an artist. And if I am wrong in this assumption, as is indeed quite possible, I beg for contradiction through your widely-extended columns.

Men in an age like the present are ready to give any sum to obtain external luxuries and the refinements of art. The misfortune is, that the education of the eye is too generally neglected amongst us; and our national character is alien to those displays which the climate, the religion, the disposition of continental nations render far more frequent than amongst us. Commerce has but little affinity to the loftiest aspiration of genius; and although willing to lend the money power with a liberal hand, can seldom do more. To cocker up, therefore, a school of second-rate art in such a society as that in which we live, is no difficult task. But more is needed; and the best mode of obtaining it seems to your humble servant not merely the creation of a certain number of vendible pictures, but the superinducing a more correct and classical habit of thought in the minds of the well-educated classes, by the dissemination of correct ideas, through the medium of good engravings, art-manufactures, and last, though not least, the works of the old masters. Owing to the want of space in our galleries and public museums, the great men of Italy are unknown amongst us. I would, above others, name one, the pride of Venice, the glorious "Tintoret." Here is a master, second, it may be affirmed, to none in design, and, as a colourist, beyond all praise, whose works are unknown in Great Britain; but then he is a master who requires "space." Others I could name—"The Bellini," "Perugino," "Andrea Mantegna," "Fra Angelico," and many, many more, all sealed volumes to English eyes. Now, I am well aware of the difficulty of approaching prejudices of long standing, and of the impossibility of changing habits of long date; and I am not, Sir, one of those who could conscientiously advocate the ornamentation of churches with large gallery pictures, yet, surely, many of our public institutions and museums afford noble opportunities for gathering round us some of the masterpieces of the olden time. I regret, indeed, far less the money that is spent in ancient works of art,* than the circumstance that many of our finest pictures, immured in the country mansions of the nobility, seldom meet the public eye. This should be remedied. The noble example of Lord Ellesmere, the Marquis of Westminster, and others, should be imitated; and those who have collections should take a laudable pride

in exposing them to the public, if possible, in their own galleries, but if not there, at least in the chambers of the British Institution. It is to be lamented too, that of late years, what may without unfairness be called the drawing-room taste, has prevailed among us. Whatever is pleasing, however contemptible or finikin, meets with a ready sale. Gerard Dow or Mieris can command any price, while genuine works by Rubens or Caracci dwindle away in neglect. A Cuyp or Teniers will command any sum, but a Domenichino or a Vandyck may be obtained at as moderate a valuation as at any time within the last century. So far then, Sir, from agreeing with Mr. Cave Thomas, that we pay too exclusive an attention to the works of the old masters, I regret to perceive that they have fallen into almost total neglect in this country, and that the masculine vigour of the ancient schools is dying away in the prettinesses of the present day. Perhaps Edwin Landseer may fairly be said to hold the palm among living English artists, yet is it not, alas! a frequent subject of regret among those who, as good judges, frequent our exhibitions, to see so great a genius exercising itself on such servile themes—a parrot, a lap-dog, pets of all sorts and sizes, Van Amburgh and his lion,—are these, it may be asked, fit subjects for the painter to treat who has immortalized himself by such pictures as "The Shepherd's Grave," and "The Shepherd's Chief Mourner?"

From what I have already urged, it will be surmised that the painter's life should be in a great measure with the past, not as excluding the light of nature, but as seeing her beauties through the assistance of his predecessors. The imitation to be aimed at by him is not of a narrow, confined, illiberal, unscientific, or servile kind. It is a faithful endeavour to progress—gleaning from antiquity all that antiquity can bestow, and superadding whatever the temper of the times or the taste of the public may enjoin. Art is the collection and putting together of raw materials. He who has the most complete and perfect assemblage of them will be the greatest artist. All knowledge and all science may therefore, in some sort, be affirmed to be the province of the painter, but surely his first and special care should be to plant his foot upon the rock of experience, and master those sublime thoughts which have been handed down to us from age to age, and have made the name of Italy a by-word for all that is externally beautiful.

"To find excellencies, however dispersed," says Sir Joshua Reynolds, "to discover beauties, however concealed by the multitude of defects with which they are surrounded, can be the work only of him who, having a mind always alive to his art, has extended his views to all ages and all schools, and has acquired from that comprehensive map which he has thus gathered to himself, a well-digested and perfect idea of his art, to which every thing may be referred. Like a sovereign judge and arbiter of art, he is possessed of that presiding power which separates and attracts every excellence from every school; selects both from what is great and what is little; brings home knowledge both from the east and from the west, making the universe tributary towards furnishing his mind, and enriching his works with originality and variety of inventions."

Again, says the same high authority, "Study, therefore, the works of the great masters for ever. Study, as nearly as you can, in the order, in the manner, and on the principles on which they studied. Study nature attentively, but always with those masters in your company; consider them as models which you are to imitate, and at the same time as rivals with whom you are to contend."

Allow me, in conclusion, to make a suggestion to you, Sir, that I think might be of service to the arts, i. e., to take up the criticism of the old masters in your journal, combining it with such of the modern masters as seem most appropriate. Raffaele and his master Perugino would go well together; they might be traced in their influence on Italian art through the three centuries of its decay, and the revival of the Raffaelesque school at Dusseldorf, under Overbeck, might well be noticed. Again, Michelangelo would be a fitting subject for a paper of some length. It would afford a good opportunity of reading, to some of our youthful artists, a lesson on their

drawings. Fuseli, among recent artists, is a good example of the "caricature of the sublime," and in that respect a good contrast with Michelangelo. A noble comparison, too, might be drawn between Michelangelo and Tintoret, for which there are some excellent hints in the second volume of "Modern Painters." But I only suggest this to your better judgment. At some future time, with leisure and opportunity, it would afford me much pleasure to aid you in carrying forward such a scheme. In landscape, Turner and Claude, or Poussin and Wilson, would be good instances to illustrate my meaning. The benefit, I think, of comparing the ancient with the modern school, and drawing out a lesson for the latter, must be admitted.

AN AMATEUR.

THE HEALTH QUESTION.

It has been determined, by a public meeting at Stratford-on-Avon, to petition the Board of Health to direct a superintending inspector to visit the town, to inquire as to its sewerage, &c., with a view to its improvement.—At Loughborough it has been determined to take the opinion of a surveyor as to improvements, but some of the inhabitants want to go farther, and contemplate taking the requisite steps to place the town under the Public Health Act.—We understand that the General Board of Health have made a communication to the town clerk of Gateshead, to the effect that they will turn their attention first to those towns from which rate-payers' petitions may be received, or to which, no petition being necessary, they may be invited by town-councils to apply the Public Health Act.—At Braintree, in Essex, an effort is being made by the rate-payers of the town, with a spirit which does them much credit, to bring into operation, in the locality, the provisions of the Public Health Act—a measure which those acquainted with the parish know is much required, in order to secure efficient drainage, and enforce that cleanliness which is so essential to comfort and safety at all times. A petition is in course of signature.—

Mr. Daniel Smith, a surgeon, has addressed a letter to the editor of the *Gloucestershire Chronicle*, containing the following illustrations of the prejudicial effect of decaying animal and vegetable matter on human health:—"Case 1st. In the early part of the month of April I was summoned to attend on the mother of a large family for some trifling malady. The cottage was isolated and healthily situated, in a village partly agricultural and manufacturing. My attention was at once directed to a reservoir near the door, purposely constructed to receive the horse-refuse, &c., and which appeared to contain both animal and vegetable matter, with water, or rather liquid manure. Feeling assured of the deleterious effects of this compound (as the excess of moisture evaporated), I warned the inmates of the certainty of fever occurring. Notwithstanding, the nuisance was suffered to remain, and a few weeks only had elapsed, when twelve out of thirteen of this family were prostrated with fever, and such was its intensity, that at one period five persons were in a state of insensibility, two died, and one (a young man) continued a drivelling imbecile for weeks: he is now only slowly recovering. His family have, in consequence, been extensive recipients from the parochial funds. I omitted to state that no other case of fever existed in the neighbourhood.—Case 2nd. I was requested to visit an aged woman, whom I found sinking with low fever: casting a look around, I found the contents of a gutter trickling before the door, and depositing its noxious contents within a few yards of the house. A son of the poor woman, on visiting her, complained of the effluvia, went home, sickened with fever, congestive disease followed, and he died, bequeathing to his parish a widow and six children.—Case 3rd. I was called to attend on a young person in the last stage of consumption. Being forcibly impressed with the similarity of my patient's condition to one I had formerly attended in the same house (though of a different family), I was induced to make some sanitary inspection. I found that a privy

* The disturbed state of Upper Italy would seem to offer an opportunity for procuring some of these works.

* "Modern Painters," in two volumes, by a Graduate of the University of Oxford.